

Keep wipes out of pipes

Q:
Why can't I flush wet wipes down the toilet?

A:
Toilet paper takes an average of 30 seconds to disintegrate in water, but wet wipes take much longer. Some of them don't break down at all and can block your home's plumbing or our sewerage network.

Q:
Why are they different to toilet paper?

A:
The majority of sewer blockages involve wet wipes being flushed down toilets. That's why we recommend people only flush the three Ps – pee, poo and (toilet) paper.

If you must use wet wipes, please make sure you buy products that meet the new Australian and New Zealand Standard for Flushable Products. These are typically made from fibrous organic materials, such as cellulose, and take about 30 minutes to break up into 10 smaller pieces.

It then takes more time for them to break down as they move through your plumbing and then into our sewerage network. If they get stuck, they can bank up quickly and cause a blockage.

However, they are more preferable than non-flushable wipes which may contain synthetic fibres, such as plastic and polyester. These are spun into a tangled mat before being compressed into a thin, soft, and pliable sheet.

When flushed, they don't disintegrate at all, leading to blocked pipes and plumbing problems.

Q:
I've seen photos of huge fatbergs being removed from pipes. What causes those?

A:
A fatberg is a massive accumulation of solid waste largely consisting of various fats, disposable wipes, and other sanitary items. If these products are flushed down the toilet and sink, they build up and get stuck in your home plumbing or our sewerage network.

As wipes take longer to break down, they collect fats and oils faster than they can disintegrate (if they disintegrate at all) which allows a fatberg to form.

This creates issues such as blocked pipes, raw sewage leaking into homes or nearby areas, and plumbing problems – all leading to a very expensive repair bill! In most cases these costs can be avoided by simply throwing wet wipes into the bin, rather than flushing them down the toilet and clogging up pipes.

Q:
What are the main causes of blocked sewerage pipes?

A:
We remove hundreds of tonnes of unwanted bathroom products and kitchen waste from our sewerage system each year. Across Australia, it's costing the community millions of dollars to deal with the issues these products cause. They can block your pipes, clog up our systems and have long-term impacts on the environment.

The main causes of blocked pipes in homes and in the sewerage network are:

- Flushing wet wipes, cotton buds, sanitary products and other rubbish down the toilet.
- Washing cooking fats, oils, grease and food scraps down the sink.



Q:
What should I do with my bathroom waste instead?

A:
We suggest you place a bin in your bathroom and toilet to dispose of personal hygiene products such as wipes, sanitary napkins, tampons, cotton buds, Band Aids and shaving blades, all which should never be flushed.

As mentioned, there's a standard for flushable products but, be careful, some products carry a similar looking symbol and don't meet the standard.

More than 400 tonnes of medicines are thrown out in Australia each year. One of the most common means of disposal is down the sink or toilet but this isn't okay. Make sure you return expired or unused medicines to your local pharmacy instead.

Q:
What about my kitchen waste?

Fats, oils and grease should never go down the drain. When oil and grease hit the cool water in your pipes, they harden and combine with other waste to form a fatberg.

Wipe greasy pans and dishes with a paper towel and dispose of it in your kitchen bin. Always make sure you let the oils and fats cool to a safe temperature before handling.

Other waste such as coffee grounds, tea leaves and food scraps should be composted. Use a sink strainer to catch small pieces of food. Before rinsing fruit, remove the label. These small, sticky labels are non-biodegradable. Individually, small scraps of food and other waste might not seem a problem, but they clump together in the sewerage system.

Q:
And what about waste from my workshop?

A:
Hazardous chemicals used for home and garden maintenance, such as paints and pesticides, can corrode pipes and damage the environment. They also pose a health threat to our maintenance staff working on sewers.

Contact your local council for safe disposal options.

Q:
Can tree roots be a problem as well?

A:
Tree roots commonly cause damage to sewerage pipes. They can enter small cracks in your pipes to seek out nutrients and then continue to grow. As they grow, they take up more space and slow down your drainage. This can eventually cause a blockage.

Signs of a blockage include slow drainage, gurgling noises or odours coming from drains.

Try not to plant trees within six metres of sewerage pipes. Your local nursery can advise on trees and their root systems.

Wannon Water – Here for you!

